NCA

VOC FOR IOP/FN

BACKGROUNDER NO. 1-9923 JANUARY 8, 1976
JOSEPH SULLIVAN

FOCUS: CHOU EN-LAI

CHOU EN-LAI -- THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA'S FIRST AND ONLY PREMIER -- IS DEAD AT THE AGE OF 78 (BORN 1898; DAY UNCERTAIN). VOA'S JOSEPH SULLIVAN HAS THESE OBSERVATIONS ON THE LIFE AND CHARACTER OF THE CHINESE STATEMAN.

VOICE:

CHOU EN-LAI MANAGED THE AFFAIRS OF STATE IN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA FOR MORE THAN A QUARTER OF A CENTURY. HE SERVED HIS COUNTRY AS A SOLDIER, DIPLOMAT, ECONOMIC MANAGER, AND HEAD OF GOVERNMENT. DURING THE COMMUNIST REVOLUTION, IT WAS CHOU'S ROLE FROM THE TIME HIS FACTION BOWED TO MAO TSE-TUNG'S LEADERSHIP IN NINETEEN THIRTY-FIVE TO BE THE PRACTICAL ADMINISTRATOR UNDER MAO'S MANTLE.

CHOU EN-LAI SOUGHT NEITHER POPULAR ACCLAIM NOR PERSONAL FAME FOR THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF HIS GOVERNMENT. NOR DID HE MAKE ANY PERSONAL AND LASTING CONTRIBUTIONS TO COMMUNIST IDEOLOGY. YET, THROUGH HIS EXTRAORDINARY INTELLECTUAL AND PHYSICAL QUALITIES AND HIS ABILITY TO AJUDICATE POLITICAL DIFFERENCE, CHOU EN -LAI KEPT THE CHINESE GOVERNMENT FUNCTIONING THROUGH MANY CRISES.

UNLIKE THE MANY MEN WHO HAVE RISEN TO POSITIONS OF AUTHORITY IN CHINA, WHO WERE BORN INTO PEASANT FAMILIES, CHOU FAME FROM MANDARIN STOCK. HE WAS A COMBINATION OF CHINESE ARISTOCRAT, CONFUCIAN SCHOLAR, AND MARXIST DIALECICIAN. HE SHOWED HIMSELF TO BE A REVOLUTIONARY AND A DEDICATED COMMUNIST. BUT HIS INCLINATIONS LAY IN THE DIRECTION OF MAKING THINGS WORK THROUGH A COMBINATION OF PRAGMATISM AND EVOLUTIONARY CHANGE.

CHOU EN-LAI WAS BORN IN EIGHTEEN NINETY-EIGHT INTO A WELL-TO-DO FAMILY. BY THE AGE OF TWENTY-TWO, HE HAD SPENT SIX MONTHS IN JAIL AS A STUDENT AGITATOR IN THE CITY OF TIENTSIN. IT WAS IN PRISON THAT HE MET FELLOW AGITATOR, TENG YING-CHAO, WHO WAS LATER TO BECOME HIS WIFE. AS A STUDENT IN FRANCE, HE HELPED ORGANIZE A CHINESE BRANCH OF THE FRENCH COMMUNIST PARTY. AT TWENTY-NINE, HE PLANNED A MASS INSURRECTION IN SHANGHAI TO HELP THE REVOLUTIONARY FORCES UNDER CHIANG KAI-SHEK TO SEIZE THE CITY.... ONLY TO BE ARRESTED AND SENTENCED TO DEATH WHEN THE NATIONALIST COMMANDER TURNED AGAINST HIS COMMUNIST COLLABORATORS. BUT CHOU ESCAPED, TO BECOME ONE OF THE LEADERS OF THE CHINESE REVOLUTION.

CHOU EN-LAI WAS TWICE A SUBORDINATE OF CHIANG KAI-SHEK IN PERIODS OF "UNITED FRONT" BETWEEN THE CHINESE COMMUNISTS AND THE KUOMINTANG. IT WAS CHOU WHO SAVED CHIANG FROM POSSIBLE EXECUTION BY DISLOYAL TROOPS WHO HAD KIDNAPPED THE NATIONALIST LEADER IN SIAN IN NINETEEN THIRTY-FIVE. IT WAS CHOU WHO ALSO PERSUADED CHIANG KAI-SHEK TO LEAD THE NATIONALIST GOVERNMENT INTO A COOPERATIVE EFFORT WITH THE COMMUNISTS AGAINST INVADING JAPANESE ARMIES.

THE ARCHITECT OF CHINA'S APPROACHMENT WITH THE UNITED STATES, CHOU NEVER VISITED THE UNITED STATES. BUT HE TRAVELED WIDELY IN EASTERN EUROPE, ASIA AND AFRICA DURING THE PERIOD BETWEEN THE BANDUNG CONFERENCE IN NINETEEN FIFTY-FIVE AND CHINA'S CULTURAL REVOLUTION. IN NINETEEN SIXTY-ONE, HE LED THE CHINESE DELEGATION TO THE 22ND CONGRESS OF THE SOVIET COMMUNIST PARTY IN MOSCOW, WHERE HE CLASHED OPENLY WITH THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP ON MATTERS OF COMMUNIST IDEOLOGY. AT THE

END OF NINETEEN SIXTY-THREE HE EMBARKED ON HIS MOST AMBITIOUS FOREIGN TOUR -- VISITING ELEVEN COUNTRIES IN FIFTY-FIVE DAYS.

CHOU WENT ALONG WITH THE ANTIREVISIONIST PURGES OF THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION LAUNCHED BY MAO TSE-TUNG IN NINETEEN SIXTY-SIX, AS HE HAD WITH THE DISASTROUS GREAT LEAP FORWARD OF NINETEEN FIFTY-EIGHT. BUT HE DID SO CAUTIOUSLY AND PRUDENTLY. AND, WHEN THE DISLOCATIONS OF THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION SHATTERED CHINA'S NATIONAL UNITY, HE ALMOST SINGLE-HANDEDLY KEPT THE ESSENTIALS OF ADMINSTRATION FUNCTIONING AND PATCHED UP FACTIONAL DISPUTES.

DURING THE LATTER YEARS OF HIS LIFE, THERE WERE RECURRING RUMORS OUTSIDE CHINA THAT CHOU HAD FALLEN FROM MAO TSE-TUNG'S FAVOR. STILL, THE COMRADESHIP WHICH EXISTED BETWEEN CHOU AND MAO -- MEN OF DIFFERENT BACKGROUNDS AND CONTRASTING PERSONAL QUALITIES -- WAS RARE IN MODERN CHINESE HISTORY. INDEED, CHOU SHOWED NO INTEREST IN SUCCEEDING TO POWER, BUT ONLY IN APPLYING THAT POWER TO WHICH HIS NAME WAS ATTACHED. HIS UNREMITTING ASPIRATION WAS TO ENDOW CHINA WITH A MEASURE OF STABILITY THAT WOULD ENDURE AFTER HIS OWN DEATH AND THE PASSING OF HIS GENERATION OF CHINESE LEADERS.

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